The Portsmouth Papers

Published by Portsmouth City Council
Civic Offices
Guildhall Square
Portsmouth PO1 2AL

No. 9 March 1970
Reprint 1980
Price 50p

9

PORTSMOUTH DURING THE GREAT FRENCH WARS 1770-1800

The PORTSMOUTH PAPERS *are published by*
Portsmouth City Council, Civic Offices,
Guildhall Square, Portsmouth, PO1 2AL

Issue Number 9 March 1970 Reprinted 1980

ISBN 0 901559 19 3

Editorial Advisory Board
COUNCILLOR F. A. J. EMERY-WALLIS (*Joint Chairman*)
COUNCILLOR JOHN S. MARSHALL (*Joint Chairman*)
COUNCILLOR MAJOR D. D. CONNORS, RA (*Retd.*)
COUNCILLOR E. H. TAPLIN
COUNCILLOR F. A. WARNER, C.Eng, MIEE
DR. D. DYMOND, CBE, MA
R. HARRISON, FMA
J. R. STURGES, DPA, JP
J. WEBB, MA, FRHistS
N. YATES, MA, FRHistS
DR. E. COURSE, BSc(Econ), FCIT (*General Editor*)
G. F. TUCKER, ARCA, ASTD (*Design and Typography*)

Cover Illustration: Engraving by (or after) Christopher Seton, 1747, showing the Fleet under Ld. Anson returning with a captured French Fleet, taken off Cape Finisterre on 3rd May 1747. In the collection of the Portsmouth City Museums

Printed by Eyre & Spottiswoode Limited at Grosvenor Press Portsmouth

PORTSMOUTH DURING THE GREAT FRENCH WARS 1770-1800

Alastair Geddes,

Perhaps the single dominant fact in the history of Portsmouth between 1770 and 1800 is that for most of that time England was at war: from 1775 first with the Americans and then also with the French and Spanish, and then from 1793 with revolutionary France. Since preparations for war with Spain were made in 1790, and there were war scares during the two preceding years, there were few years when peace – as one used to say – securely reigned. Since Portsmouth's business was primarily with war, business in most of these years was good. In 1781 it was said 'Few places in England are at present more flourishing than this: the great sums of prize money spent by the sailors, added to the wages constantly laid out by the number of hands employed in the dock-yard, cause a greater circulation of cash than is to be found in most parts of the kingdom'[1] More satirically in 1797, when disaffection with the war with France was widespread, it was said 'Earl Fitzwilliam, who patriotically, humanely, and very wisely, proposes to carry on the war until France again becomes a Monarchy, is the popular toast among the slop-sellers, publicans and gin-dealers, etc. of Portsmouth Point and Gosport Beach. If his Lordship's sensible advice is adopted, there can be no doubt but that many of these respectable characters, before the contest terminates, will have acquired sufficient property to command a seat in the upper house of parliament.' By contrast, a comment of 1788 read 'Everything at this port wears the appearance of a long continuance of peace; the shipwrights in the dock-yard were on Wednesday last reduced to a day and a tide[2], the rope-men to a day and a half.'

The same matter may be expressed in a different way. At the first census in 1801 Portsmouth's population was returned as 33,226, roughly four times the size of the next largest town in Hampshire, Southampton. There are of course no figures for fifty years earlier, but the first census published figures for births, marriages and deaths for the previous century:

For 1750 they read

Baptisms	*Marriages*[3]	*Burials*
495	95	305

For 1800 the figures were

1539	614	1363

The figures show the extremely rapid expansion of Portsmouth, suggesting that in fifty years the population had more than trebled. Contemporaries were well aware of the great growth of a new suburban Portsmouth. The *Portsmouth Guide*, 1775, said 'The next place we shall consider as meriting our attention is the Common, a kind of suburb or additional town to Portsmouth, on a part of which the dockyard stands. About eighty years ago this was a common field, with only one hovel upon it. But the prodigious resort of people to this port within these late years rendering it necessary to increase their buildings, they employed this field for that purpose, and have continued to build with such rapidity, that from a barren desolated heath, it is now become a very populous genteel town, exceeding Portsmouth itself in the number of its inhabitants and edifices.'

Portsmouth in the late eighteenth century was in fact a boom town. The three areas of conflict discussed below – the dissatisfactions of seamen in the Navy, the struggle for the control of Portsmouth Corporation, and the attempts of dockyard and other workers to protect their livelihood – although in many ways separate problems, were also each of them problems of a rapidly growing and changing society.

I PORTSMOUTH AND THE NAVY

The Navy *at* Portsmouth was the major matter *of* Portsmouth during these thirty years. Famous names – Hood, Rodney, Howe, Nelson and others – rang out; glorious victories were recorded. Yet naval unrest was so great that at Spithead in 1797 the fleet was immobilised for several weeks by mutiny. From a national point of view the mutiny at Spithead, followed by that at the Nore, have been treated as almost isolated events.[4] From a more local point of view it is doubtful if this attitude is entirely justified. Gill says of Spithead, 'The mutiny broke out with amazing suddenness.' This is true with respect to the well-kept secret of the seamen's plans, and the actual refusal of orders. But it should also be said, even judging by the limited evidence from the local press, that disaffection amounting at times to mutiny was endemic in the Navy at Portsmouth, both before and after Spithead.

---

[1] Quotations, unless separately noted, are from the *Hampshire Chronicle* between 1772 and 1800, or the *Portsmouth Telegraph* 1799–1800.

[2] A tide was a customary period of 1½ hours.

[3] 1754, no figures given for 1750.

[4] See A. Temple Patterson, The Mutiny at Spithead (*Portsmouth Papers* No. 5).
Conrad Gill *The Naval Mutineers of 1797* (Manchester 1913).
James Dugan *The Great Mutiny* (London 1966).
Manwaring & Dobree *The Floating Republic* (London 1935).

Engraving by Waters, 1765. Original in the collection of the Portsmouth City Museums.

In 1780, 1781, 1783 – two occasions at least – 1791, 1793, 1794, 1795, 1796, 1798 and 1799, incidents occurred to which the terms 'mutiny' or 'mutinous' were attached, viz.:

April 1780 – four seamen and three marines, 'mutineers' on the *Invincible*, were condemned to death by court-martial for refusing to put to sea when ordered.

April 1781 – 'This day three seamen belonging to the *Prothée* man of war who were tried last week by a court-martial for mutiny, received their respective shares of flogging from ship to ship at Spithead and in the harbour. Their sentence was one to have 400, one 500 and the other 600 lashes. A fourth who was a principal in the matter, is sentenced to be hanged, as it appeared that his scheme was to take possession of the ship, and carry her to the enemy.'

February 1783 – a military rather than a naval disturbance. Men of the 77th Highland Regiment claimed, as was probably true, that their pay was in arrears; that they had only enlisted for three years – which had passed – or the duration of the war – which was ending, and therefore refused to embark for the West Indies. They also manhandled their Lieut.-Colonel. Interested people would have noticed that the mutiny was in part successful. Three hundred men already afloat were said to have got ashore at Stokes Bay and made for Fareham but when apprehended were neither hung nor flogged but dispersed to other regiments. The *Hampshire Chronicle* was sympathetic: 'They are a set of the finest fellows we remember to have seen: and this bold stand for their freedom is a proof that they are neither deficient in courage nor resolution.' It may be noted here, in view of later events at Spithead, that Sir John Carter, Mayor of Portsmouth, had been an intermediary with the soldiers and had probably prevented a more violent outburst.

March 1783 – It having been stated that Lord Howe had come down to Portsmouth and 'quieted the minds' of the mutinous ships, it was reported a few days later that the matter was 'far from being subdued': the crews of the *Janus*, *Ganges* and *Proselyte* 'insisted on being instantly paid their wages, and discharged from the navy, otherwise they were determined to run their ships ashore and destroy them.' Incendiary letters were also addressed to the Commander-in-Chief and the Commissioner, threatening to commit outrages upon them 'unless they exerted every means in their power to obtain their pay'.

April 1783 – Arrears of pay were an important source of naval discontent. When in April the men from the *Queen*, the *Ganges* and the *Princess Royal* received their pay, the whole ships' companies were said to have come ashore together with colours flying and bands playing, and all was complete harmony. Another group, however, determined to express their hatred of the midshipmen, dressed up a boy in the uniform of a midshipman and compelled him to clean the shoes of anyone they met in the streets: in front of the same group, to make a further point, marched a petty-officer 'greedily gnawing a bone with little or no meat on it'.

April–June 1783 – It was reported that His Majesty George III was to enquire into a petition from seamen who had marched to London to seek redress; the petitioners claimed:

1 that they had been impressed men 'while their families at home experienced the most wretched state of indigence and despair';
2 that they had fought loyally;
3 'that the causes of your petitioners' desertion from your Majesty's service have arisen, in a great measure from unwise harshness to your Majesty's Petitioners, in bestowing corporal punishment upon them when their occasional meeting with an old messmate induced them to trespass a little upon their allowance of time, and to become convivial in his company; hence the terror of punishment, in this instance, is the cause of desertion, which by lenity might be prevented.';
4 'the wanton cruelty of many petty officers who, unacquainted with the duty of a seaman themselves, and raised into stations they know not how to exercise with discretion, their severities, often unrestricted, know no bounds.'; and
5 – finally – pay; the arrears of wages.

No completely satisfactory answer was given to their plea, although the *Hampshire Chronicle*'s comments suggested that the delays in payment were unnecessary. Meanwhile the Admiralty ordered that the men of the *Queen*, 'who first began the riots at Portsmouth', should lose the possible sick benefits of entry to Greenwich Hospital and their right to draw on the sick and wounded chest at Chatham, should never in future be allowed in the Navy as volunteers, and if impressed should never be raised above the rank of landsmen. The matter smouldered on at Portsmouth into the summer. In June men of the *Alecto* 'in a

riotous manner' waited on Mr. Lindegren, the Navy prize-agent, but on his refusing to meet their demand threatened to pull his house down. Later in the same month the men of the *Raisonnable* refused to weigh anchor for Chatham, where they were told they would be paid off, and demanded their pay and release at Portsmouth. On Admiral Montagu's ordering the guns of the remaining men of war and of Southsea Battery to be brought to bear on the *Raisonnable* and to sink her if necessary, the men gave in. Three of the crew were hung for mutiny after a court-martial at Chatham.

June 1791 – A mutiny in Commodore Goodall's squadron on arrival at Spithead was said to have been prevented only by paying the men off immediately on arrival. The ships were then to be immediately re-manned by fresh volunteers.

March 1793 – An enquiry was held as to the punishment of the crew of a frigate at Spithead. The men, it was stated, had forwarded a complaint about pay to the Admiralty – an action similar to the events before the Spithead mutiny – but, getting no answer, had barricaded themselves below and refused to sail. The Admiralty avoided a confrontation by dispersing 75 of the men to other ships, earning the acid comment from the *Hampshire Chronicle* that in the first case the complaint should have been looked into and, secondly, that dispersing the crew was liable only to spread disaffection to other ships.

December 1794 – The crew of the *Culloden* mutinied and held their ship for several days: the mutineers were later hanged, though it was subsequently claimed that they had been offered a free pardon.[1]

January 1796 – One man, of a number accused of mutiny from the *Poupée*, was punished with 300 lashes 'from ship to ship'. Popular sympathy at this period was not necessarily on the side of authority. In August of this year a soldier accused of attempting to strike an officer was sentenced to 300 lashes: on appeal it was claimed that he had only raised an arm to defend himself against an officer and a sergeant. The mob in Portsmouth in this case knew its allegiance: 'the whole town of Portsea has been in a general confusion; and very large mobs have been collected to hiss and pelt the officers of the Bucks militia, several of whom have received considerable injury.'

April 1797, Spithead – Local reports of the Spithead mutiny add little that is new to any of the studies already published. The original complaints of 16th April were published in detail in the local press, both the petition to Parliament and also that to the Admiralty, along with names of the two delegates from each of 16 ships at Spithead. The determination of the mutineers was made clear, but also the hope of a speedy settlement. The later fears of the men that promises of improved conditions and royal pardon might not be honoured, leading to what is sometimes called the second mutiny beginning with the shootings on the *London* on 7th May, and the eventual celebration of the men's victory were also fully reported.

The most noticeable thing about the local reports is that they are so evidently sympathetic. In the first place, by printing the men's demands in full, many people in and around Portsmouth must have been impressed by the tone of the petition. For example, shore leave when in port was demanded 'that we may in some-wise have grant and opportunity to taste the sweets of liberty on shore, when in harbour, and when we have completed the duty of our ship, after our return from sea.' Necessary limitations to such leave were accepted and punishments for infringement assumed. This particular clause concluded by saying that the claim 'is a natural request and congenial to the heart of man, and certainly to us, that you make the boast of being the guardians of the land'.

Secondly, the newspaper emphasised the orderliness of the mutineers. In the first reports published on 22nd April it was said that 'the sailors conduct themselves with great propriety, only they are determined to carry their point: they regulate everything on board the *Queen Charlotte* which they call the *Parliament Ship* to which each ship at Spithead sends four *representatives* every morning to consult on the measures to be pursued. The representatives (or, as the sailors call them, their *lawyers*) take an oath which is administered with the greatest decorum.' Or again, 'It is but common justice to say that the seamen have conducted themselves throughout the whole business with a sobriety, steadiness, unanimity and determined resolution that would do honour to any cause.'

The part played by Sir John Carter, the Mayor, in arranging that those seamen injured during the fighting on the *London*, and who had died at Haslar Hospital, might be buried at Kingston is well known.

---

[1] See Gill, *op. cit.*

The thanks of the crew of the *London* for his intervention are worthy of record.

H.M. Ship *London*
May 11 1797

'Most Honoured Sir,

The very distinguished manner in which you was pleased to treat the part of the ship's company which were on the shore yesterday attending the funeral of our unfortunate shipmates claims the attention of every heart endued with the smallest spark of humanity.

We therefore, the Ship's Company of the said ship the *London*, do most humbly offer to you our most sincere and unfeigned thanks for these marks of attention you have been pleased to show our shipmates and which we consider as if done to ourselves.

We hope to live to prove ourselves worthy of your notice and beg most humbly to remain.

Most Hon'd Sir,
Your Most Obed'
and Most Faithful Servants,
By Order of the Ship's Company — John Fleming, William Legg — Delegates'[1]

On Monday, 15th May, Earl Howe led the celebrations that ended the mutiny at Spithead. The royal pardon had been received and most of the seamen's claims were met, but although the *Hampshire Chronicle* proclaimed on the 20th of May 'Harmony is now completely restored here', it would be mistaken to think that conflict had ended. Early in June, 'the crew of the *Triumph* man of war at Spithead still continues in a state of mutiny', and the crew of the *Intrepid* at St. Helen's were said to be 'in a very refractory state'.

A letter to Sir John Carter, as Mayor, from the Duke of Portland at the Home Office on the 26th May makes it clear that complete harmony certainly did not exist.

'Sir,

Having received accounts of some riotous proceedings having been committed on Shore at Portsmouth by certain Sailors from the Fleet there, I lose no time in calling your immediate attention to the most effectual manner of suppressing any further attempts which may be made of this nature.

I need not observe to You that the Law has placed the Civil Authority of the Town in Your Hands and those of the Corporation, and that you are called upon and required, upon an occasion like the present, to do your utmost for the suppression of such Riots. If therefore they should be continued, you will not fail to shut the Gates, the better to apprehend and secure the Rioters, who should be immediately sent under proper escort to Winchester Gaol. In the meantime it will be highly necessary to swear as special Constables all the most Respectable Inhabitants of the Town, who I am confident will come forward at such a moment, for the preservation of the Peace, and good order.

Should Military Force be requisite in aid of the Civil Authority, for the maintenance of the Peace, an application from you to Sir William Pitt, and the Commander of the Volunteer Corps in Your Neighbourhood, will of course be immediately complied with.

I am,
Sir,
Your most obedient
humble Servant,
Portland.

It would seem, not only that order had not been restored, but that Portland was informing Carter of matters which legally one may be sure Carter well knew but which perhaps he, as a radically-inclined Whig, was reluctant to put into effect. Three days later Portland again wrote in reply to a further letter from Carter:

'Whitehall 29 May 1797

Sir,

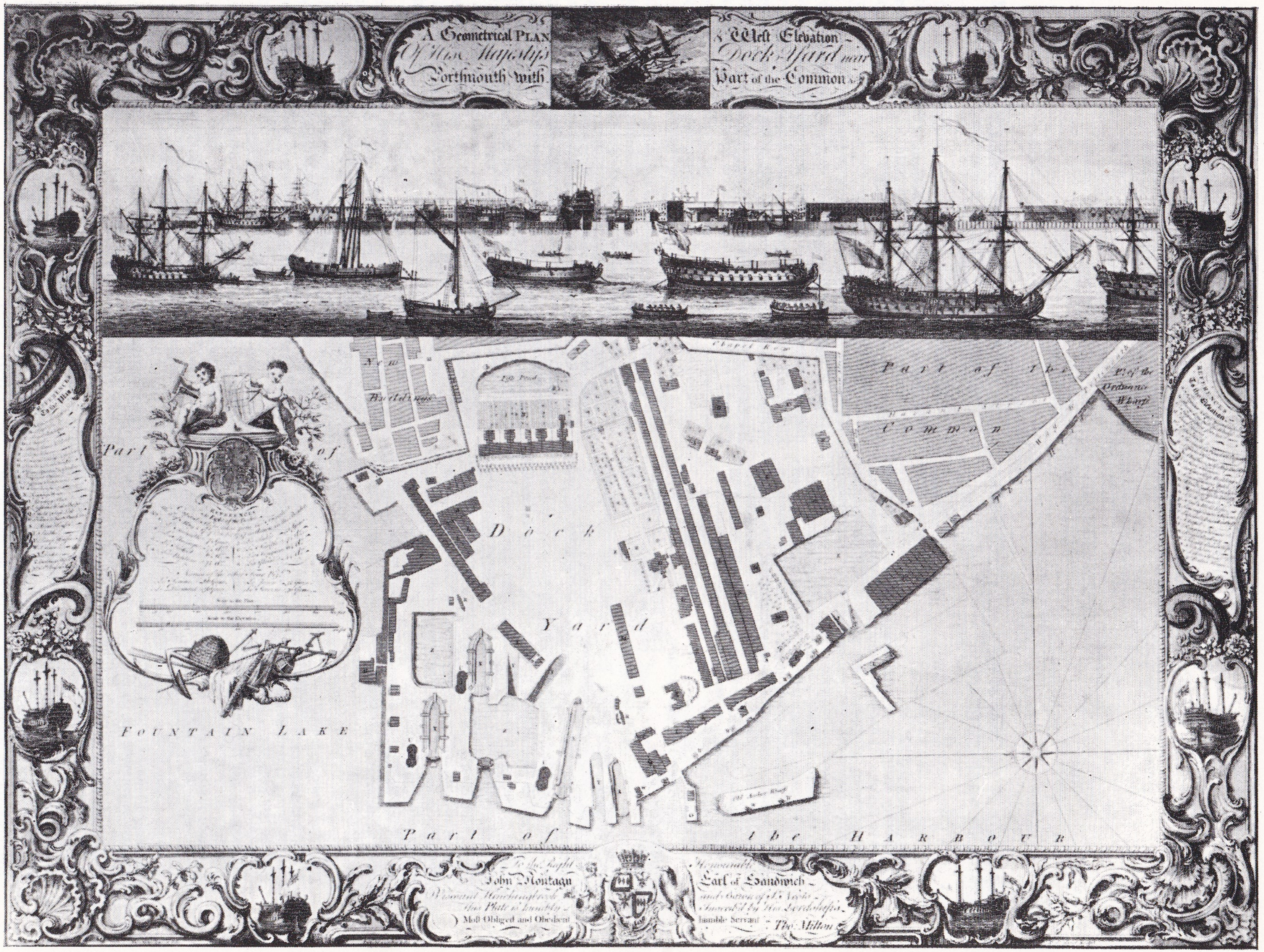
I have received your letter of yesterday's date in which you give us an account of the 40 or 50 sailors who threatened to break open the Gaol and to release the other Sailors who were Prisoners there, and who persisted in such conduct in your presence – a proceeding so outrageous, in contempt of the Civil Authority, in the face of the Chief Magistrate, in such a place as Portsmouth, and in such a moment as the present, is of the worst example. – I am confident that should any other attempts be made of so outrageous a nature and so injurious to the civil authority, that your duty will call upon you to have recourse to the necessary measures – for apprehending and securing the Persons offending.

I am,
etc., etc.
Portland'

One other local comment is significant, again from the *Hampshire Chronicle*. Halfway through the mutiny, that is, before the shooting on the *London*, the newspaper referred to the fears of those who thought that granting of the seamen's requests would be 'a death blow to the discipline of the navy'. This the *Chronicle* denied, and then added that officers 'are quite indifferent whether they command over men at ninepence three farthings a day or at one shilling. The sailors, in the present instance, have no thanks to render either to Howe, Bridport or Gardner – they have done all themselves.'

The catalogue of disaffection now continued as before April.

[1] This letter and the Carter-Portland correspondence which follows are in a collection of Carter papers in the Portsmouth City Record Office.


A Geometrical PLAN
Of His Majesty's
Portsmouth with
West Elevation
Dock Yard near
Part of the Common
Part of the Common
Part of the Dock Yard
FOUNTAIN LAKE
Part of the HARBOUR
John Montagu
Earl of Sandwich
Most Obliged and Obedient
humble Servant
Tho: Milton

Engraving by Thos. Milton, 1754. In the collection of the Portsmouth City Museums.

June–July 1797 – Courts-Martial for mutiny of men of the *Poupée* and of the *Phoenix*. In the first case four men sentenced to be hung (of whom two were later recommended for mercy) and one to twelve months' imprisonment, and in the other, one to be hung, two to be imprisoned and one to receive 200 lashes.

July 1798 – Admiral Waldegrave, President of the court-martial for mutiny of men from the *Adamant*, sentenced one man to be hung and one to be flogged round the fleet. In passing sentence he pointed out to the prisoners that England was fighting the enemy of all mankind who were annihilating all religion, destroying every social tie, etc. Another court-martial was held on the *Royal William*, where members of the crew of the *Pluto* were said to have threatened to take the ship to the French.

September 1798 – The *Defiance* was said to be in a state of mutiny on arriving at Spithead: a later comment added that a number of mutinous men were members of the United Irishmen. Nineteen of the men were sentenced to death, of whom eight were later reprieved, the remainder being hung at different ships at Spithead and in Portsmouth Harbour.

The story had no ending during this period. The mutiny at Spithead was the largest protest, primarily a peaceful and successful one, but a thread of disaffection, of violent protest, runs through the whole period.

Mutiny, or a mutinous act, whether of a fleet or on a single ship, or of a number of soldiers, was only one aspect of the violence in naval and military Portsmouth during these thirty years. The dangers of naval life in themselves introduced a stridence, a further crudity – and the greater dangers were not those of death at the hands of the enemy. In April 1781 the newspaper published figures given by the Navy Board. Between September 1774 and September 1780, 176,008 men had been raised: between 1776 and 1780 only 1,244 had been killed, but 18,545 had died. Disease was more dangerous than bullets: when Hyde Parker's fleet left Spithead for the Mediterranean in July 1797 it was said that a number of men above the normal complement had been embarked, since many of the crew, having scarcely been in port for three and a half years, were 'very sickly'.

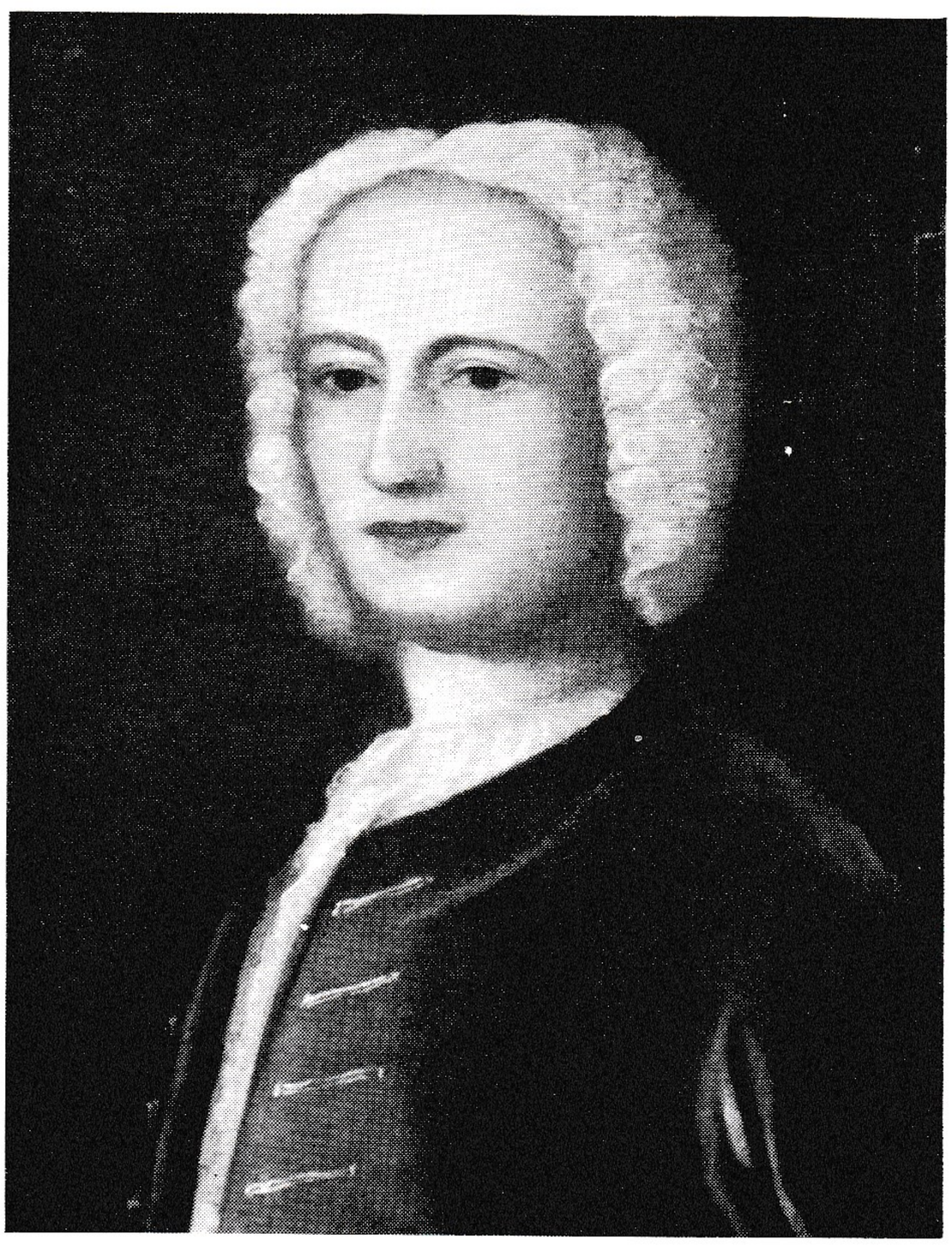
A more serious problem to the Navy, again a cause of more violence, more conflict, was the desertion rate. The figures given above were incomplete: to the totals of 1,244 killed and 18,545 died should have been added 42,069 deserted. This, like most other talk about 'conditions', may be seen in two ways. On the one hand discipline must have been loose to allow so many dissatisfied men to break away, or it can be said that naval life was so harsh that 42,000 men escaped, 'taking the chance of a hundred or two hundred lashes if convicted. In 1791 senior naval officers were 'kept daily employed on different courts-martial on seamen for desertion', and later special detachments of soldiers were kept posted along the coast to catch deserters. As an encouragement to the soldiers, 40s. reward was offered for each man caught.

Partly because of the high rate of desertion, there was the press gang. The more cruel the naval life, the greater the number of deserters and the greater the likelihood of the use of the press, and so once again the greater the violence. For the most part the press in Portsmouth was accepted as one of the facts of life. The Spithead mutineers did not raise the issue; they were concerned about conditions inside the Navy. Nor, very often, did civilians in Portsmouth: the Navy was their chief business, but how the Navy got its men was no matter to them. At times the activities of the press-gang interfered with the comforts of life: in November 1776, 'scarce a fish or even an oyster is to be got' because of the press-gangs, and although it might at another time be admitted that the men 'ill relish the service', there was satisfaction in that 'a number of loose and disorderly fellows' had been picked up. Doubts as to the general validity of the press system were rarely voiced, although in 1770 a Gosport correspondent to the *Gentleman's Magazine* had argued that it was completely unconstitutional.

If a prison is a place of enforced confinement, then prisons and prisoners add an element of concealed conflict to a local community, Portsmouth as a naval and military town was well endowed with prisoners, even though they were seldom seen. Gates in his *History of Portsmouth* said 'Few pages of old Portsmouth history present so many features of romantic interest as those that deal with convict life.'[1] I doubt if many Portsmouth people of the late eighteenth century felt very strongly this romantic appeal. The first convict ship for Botany Bay left Portsmouth in May 1787 with 211 marines to guard the prisoners, 30 of them being accompanied by their wives. The voyage alone would deter a very romantic view; the eighteenth-century *Hampshire Chronicle* was more realistic when it said, apropos marines who had volunteered, 'even in slavery there is bread', whereas at home the men

[1] Gates *History of Portsmouth* (1900), p. 547.

John Carter, 1715-1794. From a painting (artist and date unknown) in the collection of the Portsmouth City Museums.



'are in want of the common necessaries of life'. The first convicts for the famous hulks, condemned in 1802 as inadequate for even the stowage of prisoners, arrived in Portsmouth the year before men left for Botany Bay. Rejects from society, they caused Portsmouth no great anxiety, but barely a month after they had arrived two were killed and six wounded in an attempted escape. Again in 1794 and 1797 there were further escapes, some men succeeding in getting away, others being killed or wounded in the attempt.

During the French Revolutionary War, French prisoners of war at Forton and Portchester added to the local prison population. At first there was felt to be something interesting about French prisoners, but when, as in both September and October 1794, over 200 died of fever, interest changed to concern. The occasional escapes in subsequent years added a further threat of violence to the Portsmouth scene.

I have stressed here the ugliness, the conflict, the cruelty of the naval and military aspects of life in Portsmouth. Cruelty, violence and revolt were not continuous, but Portsmouth was continually liable to experience all three. There were indeed further occurrences that could make for a yet harsher picture: the invasion fears of 1779 and the 1790s, the great dockyard fires of 1770 and 1776, and the crowd fighting for pieces of David Tyne's body after he had been hung, drawn and quartered for treason on Southsea Common in 1782. In August 1797, a few months after the mutiny at Spithead, the *Hampshire Chronicle* itself made a general comment. During the American war, it said, conversation at Portsmouth Point had been about whether any prizes had been brought in. Now, said the paper, the question was 'Is there to be an execution today?'.

II PORTSMOUTH POLITICS

The turmoil of naval Portsmouth appears to be little related to its political life. Seamen were struggling for a pittance in money and for relief from an almost barbaric servitude, and no such matters disturbed an eighteenth-century corporation. Also whereas naval Portsmouth was at its most violent towards the end of the century, it was during the American War of Independence that a political struggle was fought as to who should control the election of the town's two members of Parliament: seamen had no part in this conflict; the Admiralty certainly had.

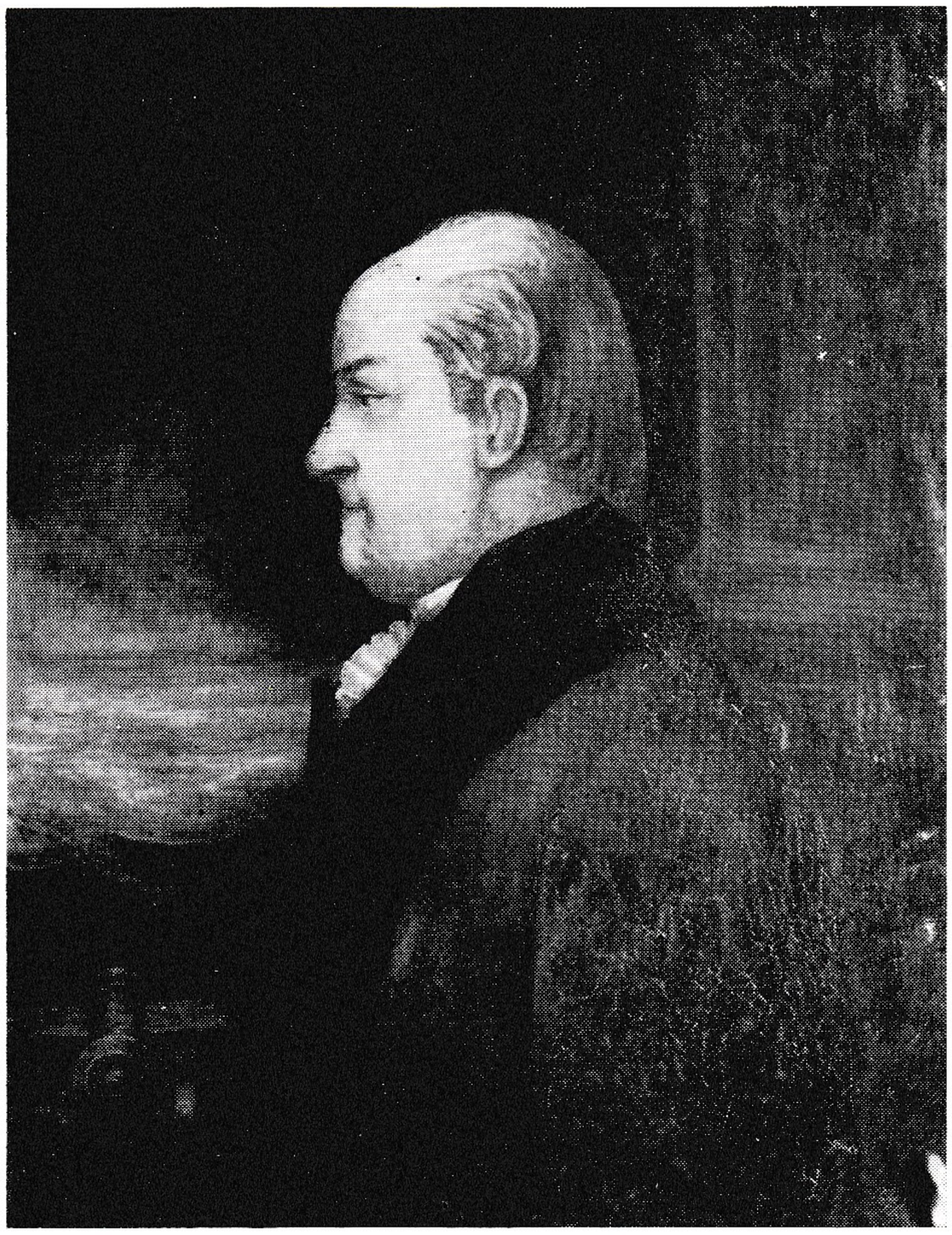
The right of election in the borough of Portsmouth lay in the Corporation—the mayor, aldermen and burgesses: the latter were unlimited in number and were elected by the mayor and aldermen.[1] Therefore, as everyone well understood, whoever could nominate the bench of aldermen could control the parliamentary representation. As Portsmouth was a naval town, it had earlier been assumed that the Admiralty, in particular the First Lord of the Admiralty, had a natural and proper control: as the eighteenth century expressed it, had 'the prevailing interest'.

In 1751 a satirical poem was published, 'The Geese in Disgrace, Humbly inscribed to the Corporation of P - ts - h.' In this fable the geese represent the aldermen of the Corporation and the eagle the First Lord of the Admiralty.

> '. . . . . .
> These *Geese* became incorporate,
> Whether by *Charter* out of Date
> Or Grant more modern, 'tis all one,
> And not so needful to be shown.

[1] Whilst the number of burgesses was not restricted by law, in practice their number varied between about 40 and 150. In 1834, excluding the mayor and aldermen, there were 92 other burgesses 'of whom 46 were elected in January last past'. See pages 803 and 806 of the Hampshire Section of the Reports from the Commissioners on the Municipal Corporations in England and Wales, 1834.

Sir John Carter, Mayor of Portsmouth, 1769, 72, 82, 86, 89, 93, 96, 1800 and 1804 (including the period of the Spithead Mutiny in 1797)
From a painting (artist and date unknown) in the collection of the Portsmouth City Museums.



Let it suffice 'That three and ten'
Were dubbed 'the Mayor and Aldermen',
That Custom, or their Charter sent
Two members up to Parliament:
But as that House would not admit
Of Geese to be returned and sit,
Well judging that such shallow Pates
Were ne'er intended for Debates,
They usually paid the Compliment
Of choosing those the *Eagle* sent.,
. . . . . .

The point was clearly put; the Admiralty had a natural right to choose the members.

Twenty years later a bitter battle was fought between eagle, geese and goslings, a struggle which rather surprisingly, and a little fortuitously, ended in the defeat of the eagle.

The opponents of Admiralty control were a comparatively homogeneous group led by the Carter family – John Carter and his two sons, John Carter Jnr., knighted in 1773, and William Carter. The group also included Thomas and William White, R. G. Temple, John Godwin, Timothy Pike, and others. They were primarily a trading group, with particularly strong interests in brewing. The Carters and several others were dissenters, members of the High Street Chapel – a group formerly known as Presbyterian but moving towards the acceptance of the term Unitarian. Inevitably at this time they belonged to the Whig interest: they opposed the Test and Corporation Acts which restricted public office to the members of the Church of England, they disliked the American war and were in favour of some measure of Parliamentary reform.[1] Their opponents were a less unified group: throughout the seventies they were led by Aldermen Linzee and Varlo, regarded by the Carter group as 'placemen', that is, men with government appointments who could therefore be bought or influenced. In 1775 Linzee was described as an 'apothecary to the garrison' and Varlo as a 'contractor of blocks for the Navy'. They were not tainted with dissent; their patron was the Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty.

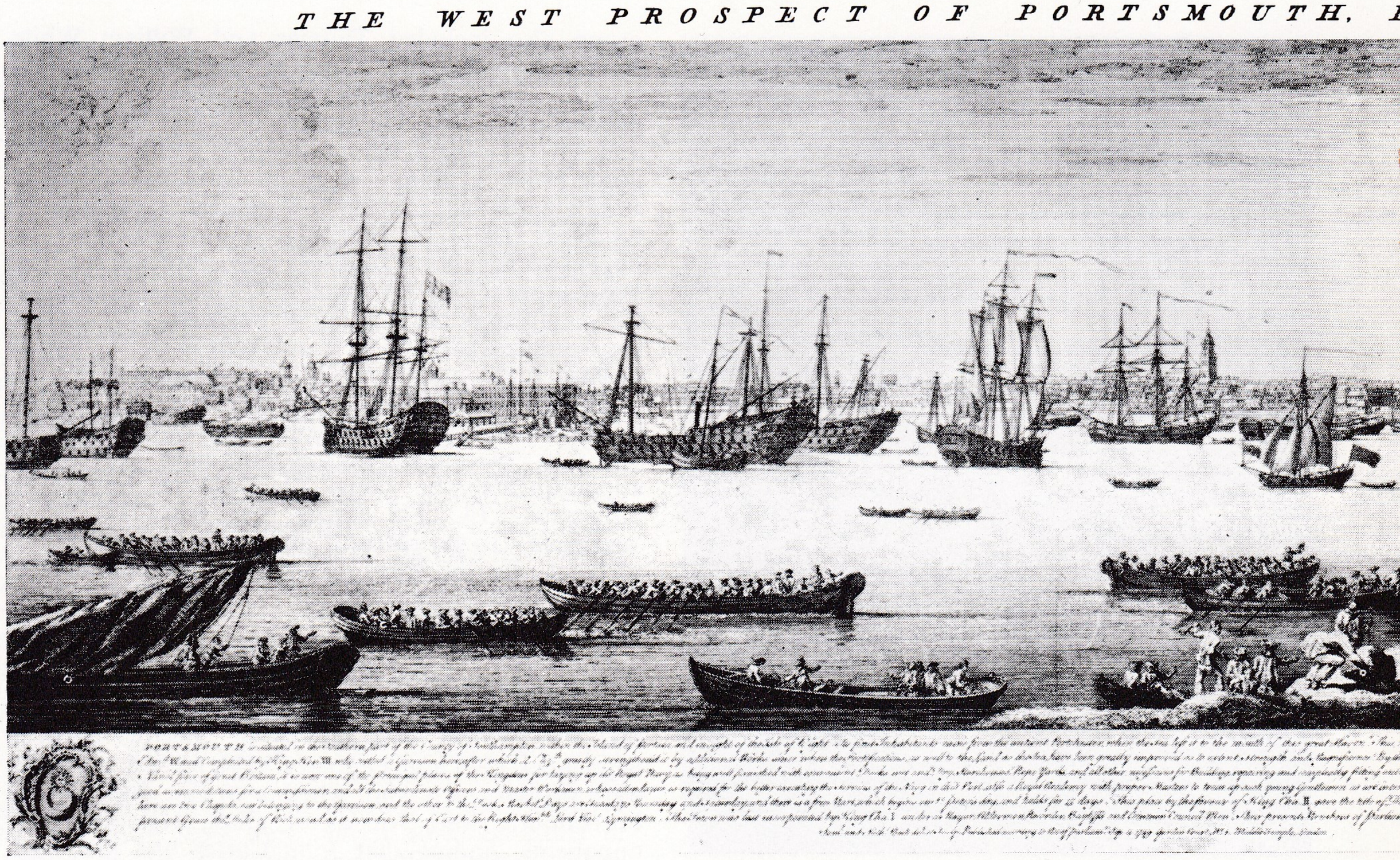
In 1772 John Carter, Jnr. (from June 1773 Sir John Carter) became Mayor; in this year and the following, when his brother William held the office, it was clear that the Carters were aiming at control. Between September 1773 and February 1774, 43 new burgesses were chosen; men who, whether or not they lived in Portsmouth, were friends or allies. However their opponents, finding that John Carter had first been elected to the corporate body while a minor, proceeded to law and obtained a judgement that all the acts of the Corporation in his Mayoralty were illegal. This was in March 1775 and out went the Mayor, Thomas White (to be succeeded by Philip Varlo for the Admiralty group) and also Sir John Carter, John Missing the Recorder, five other aldermen and sixty burgesses.

From this time onwards the conflict was total and at times almost humorous. Each group was determined to block the other. Two months after Varlo had ousted White of the Carter group, he and Linzee – in order to strengthen their position – proposed that seven of their supporting burgesses should be made aldermen: Carter and the two Whites protested, but the Mayor and Linzee 'deemed them to be elected'.[2]

---

[1] For information on the Carter family and the struggle for the control of the Corporation, see V. Bonham Carter, *In a Liberal Tradition* (London, 1960).
[2] Portsmouth Corporation. Entries of Orders, Town Leases, Burgesses, etc., 1751–1801.

Engraving by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck, 1749, in the collecton of the Portsmouth City Museums.



The Carters threatened legal action as to Varlo's rightful authority as mayor, and further put forward their own list of nominees to fill the aldermanic bench. Linzee and Varlo not only rejected this but further stated an objection to the election of any non-resident burgesses.

In September 1775 Thomas Munday, one of the seven burgesses lately proposed as aldermen by Linzee and Varlo, was chosen Mayor by his friends (see below). Munday was succeeded by Philip Varlo, and the latter, followed by Linzee and Bissell, succeeded in holding on to a nominal mayoralty until September 1779. The position, however, was one of stalemate rather than control. An action at the Court of King's Bench, similar to that taken by the Admiralty group in White's mayoralty, was successfully taken by the Carter group: Munday in his turn was ousted, along with a number of the Admiralty aldermen. On 12th September 1778, during Edward Linzee's mayoralty and because of the last-mentioned legal decision, there were aldermanic vacancies to be filled. The business proceeded as follows:

1 Carter group proposed John Missing (lately ousted) –
Mayor objected on grounds that he was a dissenter –
Carter group denied this –
Mayor voted against Missing, proposed and voted for Ballard –
Carter group voted against Ballard and voted for Missing.

2 Carter group proposed Gawler (lately ousted) –
Mayor objected on grounds that he was a dissenter –
Carter group denied this –
Mayor voted against Gawler, proposed and voted for Carlos –
Carter group voted against Carlos and voted for Gawler.

3 Carter group proposed Pike (lately ousted) –

Mayor objected –
Mayor voted against Pike, proposed and voted for Bissell –
Carter group voted against Bissell and voted for Pike.

Here the Mayor's objection was that Pike was Chamberlain of the Corporation, and that such office was not compatible with the rank of alderman. To this the Carter group replied that (a) they saw no incompatibility, and (b) that Pike had now relinquished the office of Chamberlain.

4 Carter group proposed White (lately ousted) –
Mayor objected –
Mayor voted against White, proposed and voted for Munday –
Carter group voted against Munday and voted for White.

This time the Mayor's objection was that the Carter nominee had been elected a burgess before the age of 21 and so was, by law, removable and incapable of being made an alderman. The reply of the Carter group (a fine pragmatic view) was that Richard White had enjoyed a burgess's position for twenty-six years without any objection ever having been made, and that he had been elected an alderman in the presence of Linzee and Varlo in 1775, and they had then made no such objection, but had then stated that he was a dissenter . . . [1].

Again, in September 1779 Edward Linzee was chosen mayor but 'did not attend to be sworn in', and therefore John Bissell continued to act as mayor. The Carter group in October declared this to be illegal and themselves therefore chose John Carter to fill the vacancy. John Carter 'did immediately take and subscribe the Oaths of Allegiance, Supremacy and Abjuration, and repeat and subscribe the Test against Transubstantiation, and was duly sworn Mayor . . . '[2] As this was contrary to the form required by the charter, a writ was obtained against Carter and a fresh election held in February 1780, when John Godwin was chosen by the Carter group. This too was illegal, and by a further mandamus dated 18 April Carter was ordered to swear in Linzee. This he refused to do. Godwin resigned in the month following, and there was no mayor at all, real or pretended, until the 19th September, when Linzee was sworn in for a period of ten days, being followed by a now duly elected Godwin. Alderman Varlo having already died, only Edward Linzee now remained to maintain the Admiralty cause: his death in May 1782 ended this extraordinary struggle. In August a solely Whig Corporation – John Godwin, Mayor, John Carter, Thomas White, John White, John Merac, Thos. White of Milton and John Gawler – duly appointed 37 new burgesses, 28 of whom had previously been ousted. No Tory aldermen remained and the Whig or Carter group held absolute control, a control which they maintained until the Reform Act of 1832.

It had been a bitter struggle, an unedifying one to those who prefer to think of politics as 'clean'. The local historian East referred to it as 'this sad struggle',[3] but at least part of its significance was that the conflict was publicly, if somewhat obliquely, discussed in the local press, and that here lay some degree of political education. The debate began in October 1773. 'Veritas' (most correspondents used pseudonyms), while in general not accepting the rights of dissenters to

---

[1] ibid.
[2] ibid.
[3] R. East. *Extracts from the Portsmouth Records.* Portsmouth, 1891.

a part in public life, argued 'till you can advance some argument to prove that dissenters are less honest in their principles, and less deserving the favour and goodwill of their neighbours, it will be in vain for you to attempt to deprive them of an equal claim to the honour and official emoluments of this town'. Further, with regard to the election of non-resident burgesses, Carter 'by a long and unremitted attention to the wishes of this town' had gained an influence, and so had been able 'to elect such Aldermen and Burgesses as he has reason to believe will promote such measures as he thinks conducive to the good of the public'. In these two arguments – the rights of dissenters, and the appropriateness of non-resident burgesses – lay the public bones of contention. The Admiralty group immediately replied that Alderman Varlo and George Binstead thanked the public for the support they had received for 'our public-spirited behaviour (as you are pleased to term it) in favour of the Old Inhabitants of this Borough, . . . so many non-residents and strangers having lately been made Burgesses in preference to and to the prejudice of the old and settled inhabitants'. To this it was replied that since a Parliamentary resolution of 1675 had stated that the right of election in Portsmouth lay solely in the Mayor, Aldermen and burgesses, the Carters had done nothing illegal. But the opponents of the Carter group had no wish to fight on the grounds of the legality of the case, since there were indeed no limits either of number or place of residence of burgesses: they argued instead the case of natural justice. There were, it was said, more than 20,000 inhabitants of Portsmouth, 'many of them . . . good citizens and men of considerable property', and to choose men from outside was as absurd as if Portsmouth people should go to Titchfield to choose 'a minister, parish officer or Constable for Titchfield'. 'Senex', who earlier had defended the legal right of the Mayor and Aldermen to make such burgesses as they thought fit, attempted again a moderate line. He abandoned any defence of the appropriateness of appointing non-residents to the Corporation, 'an evil which calls loudly for redress', but stated that the Mayor, William Carter, 'though not a householder, is a constant inhabitant, a merchant, and of considerable connexions and expectations within the town'.

'Inhabitant of Portsmouth' would make no such concessions. He would grant Carter no great ability or education, and preferred to regard him as having been forced 'into the chief seat too hastily by his father' (John Carter senr.). As to whether the Carters were justified as acting on grounds of principle, 'though it might be thought right by them to oppose ministry, yet as it does not concern themselves alone, but the whole borough, it appears to be the grossest arrogance in them to dictate to and rule so arbitrarily so great a body of people, a body of near twenty thousand'. It was indeed, said the writer, doubtful anyway if the issue was primarily of principle. 'It may be only a struggle who shall nominate the members, Mr. C– or the First Lord of the Admiralty? In which case which is likely to be of most advantage to the borough, the First Lord of the Admiralty or Mr. C–'s nomination? We all know which of the two men can be of most essential service to Portsmouth'.

These were issues of national as well as local importance: the political rights of dissenters, the legality or appropriateness of out-burgesses, the evil of oligarchy, and also political 'realism' – that politics is about who provides the best jobs for the most people.

At times direct statement gave way to irony. A report of a meeting of the Corporation in December 1773 stated that 'The Premier' (i.e. William Carter) proposed to make nine new burgesses. These were:

Mr. Moses Israel	Mr. Solomon Napthali
Mr. Emanuel Levy	Mr. Abram David
Mr. Aaron Moses	Mr. Isachar Solomon
Mr. Isaac Fonseca	Mr. Abraham Solomon
Mr. Reuben France	

'All of Duke's Place, London, and College Street, Portsmouth.' It was also said that some doubts had been raised as to whether they could take the Test, but that the Recorder (a member of the Carter group) had replied that this was a mere matter of form. This 'report' was presumably a satirical exaggeration or *reductio ad absurdum* of the Carter party's reliance on the support of dissenters.

The Carters, however, were not strong enough to control the election of 1774, and for the remainder of that year their fortunes fell. The allegations made during the King's Bench action mentioned (on p. 11) above that all Sir John Carter's acts as mayor were illegal because he had been elected burgess while not of age were made public in May, and judgement was given against him in November. It was the triumph of the Admiralty group, which they celebrated by such squibs as

> 'To Mr. C—r. late Premier of the B of P . . . by nominating Presbyterians, and Non-residents to be Aldermen and Burgesses of this borough, that you intended usurping the charter of it . . .', or again,
>
> 'The Corporation, being by a late decision, purged (if I may use the expression) of its obnoxious members, . . .'.

After the deposing of Thomas White as Mayor a few months later public criticism on the other hand now mainly concerned itself with the sins of the Admiralty, or Tory, group. In the heaviest of satire, 'Chrononhotonthologos' attacked the theory of Portsmouth's natural dependence on the Navy, which was used to justify Lord Sandwich's control. 'Whereas the *only* support and dependence of the inhabitants of this town and borough is in the Royal Navy of England, the Dockyard Garrison and Arsenal.' 'Whereas', continued the writer, Portsmouth's situation was quite useless for trade, and the Dockyard itself was sited in Portsmouth 'just out of kindness to the people of Portsmouth', and 'whereas the person who at present presides over that department (the Admiralty) is so reasonable and moderate in his expectations as to desire *only* a renunciation of their freedom and privileges, to be resigned into his, or his agent or factor's hand. . . .'

Instead of the dangers of dissent and the evils of out-burgess-ship, dependence on the Admiralty was now the evident evil. The Linzee-Varlo group were accused of 'transferring the predominating interest of this *free* borough from the hands of gentlemen of independent fortune, unblemished character, and uncorrupt integrity into those of government'. 'Chrononhotonthologos' in September 1776 again satirically attacked Philip Varlo, the newly-elected Tory Mayor 'by whose rare abilities, inflexible integrity and unremitting assiduity, this town has been rescued from the most horrible slavery, and brought into a state of the most perfect freedom and independence'. Lest anyone might not notice the satirical intent he also pointed out that nineteen out of twenty of the new mayor's supporters 'have good comfortable places and contracts under government'.

The public dispute in the newspaper, it must be admitted, fell away before the actual Corporation contest had been resolved. Possibly to some extent interest focused elsewhere; 'Senex', earlier a moderate supporter of the Carters', was in February 1775 busy upholding the interests of the American colonists: 'taxing them without their consent is absolutely unconstitutional, for the Commons of America cannot be said to be represented or consenting by the Commons of England'. Possibly also the long-lasting situation referred to above, once the major issues had been argued, made further discussion difficult. By the end of 1775 satire was abandoned for abuse, which only expert local knowledge can translate. I cannot tell who was Mr. Nimble Knuckles, said to be Chrononhotonthologos's patron, nor who was Tommy Shuffle-Breeches, said to be the latter's coadjutor.

It is, however, possible that the anti-Admiralty group in Portsmouth was from this time onwards more concerned in county politics than in arguments as to the control of the Borough. Since all those in Portsmouth possessed of a forty-shilling freehold had a franchise for the county constituency, it is necessary to mention briefly the county scene. In 1775 a Hampshire Constitutional Club was formed with John Carter as one of its leading members. At the contested bye-election for the county in December 1779, when Jervoise Clarke Jervoise, of Idsworth, in the Whig interest, defeated Sir Richard Worsley, a government candidate, the Carters and their friends were among his active supporters. Again, in the movement to form county associations to press for reform, a movement nationally associated with the names of Wyvill and Cartwright, a Hampshire petition was carried and Portsmouth was one of the centres where it might be signed. In March 1783, at a county meeting at Winchester, the following resolutions were passed:

1 That the government of this realm is in a King, an hereditary permanent Nobility, and a temporary elective House of Commons, freely chosen by the people as their Representatives.

2 That an hereditary or in any way fixed seat in the House of Commons, is inconsistent with every idea of Representation, and contrary to the Constitution.

3 That frequent and new Parliaments tend very much to the happy union and good agreement of the King and People.

4 That the present representation of the Commons is unequal, and ought to be brought nearer to its primitive constitution.

A copy of the petition embodying these resolutions was lodged, for people of Portsmouth to sign, with R. G. Temple and W. A. Bettesworth, who were also members of the Carter Corporation group. More specifically, Sir Harry Featherstonehaugh, elected M.P. for Portsmouth in June 1782 when the Corporation was finally Carter-controlled, was in May 1783 given 'immediate instructions' by the Corporation to support Pitt's motion for reform. 'We mention this', said the *Hampshire Chronicle*, 'as a rare instance of true patriotism, and is, we believe, the only one of its kind, where a corporate body have unanimously solicited to give up their chartered rights, for the good of the people'.

Here in a sense lay a double dichotomy. Portsmouth was a corrupt borough, a pocket borough, was part of a system that reformers wished to abolish; yet from 1782 onwards that corporation was in favour of parliamentary reform. Secondly, although from the above date until 1832 the Whig group held Portsmouth in its pocket, they were quite unable to exercise any decisive influence over the voters from Portsmouth in the county elections, votes so numerous as almost to control the county itself. In the bye-election of December 1779 referred to above, when control of the Corporation was still in doubt, the names Carter, White and Missing were found among lists of Jervoise's supporters, but it was generally assumed that Portsmouth voters must be reckoned to be controlled by Government, by the Admiralty interest. A letter from Portsmouth read,

> 'To the Dependent Freeholders of the
> County of Southampton
> Gentlemen,
> I address you under this humiliating appellation in conformity to a too generally received opinion, that all who receive pay from Government, as well the useful artificer as the lazy, blood-sucking pensioner and placeman, are precluded from all right of private judgement or liberty of choice, in a matter of all others the most important, that of choosing your representatives in Parliament.'

It was further suggested that such slavery in Portsmouth must be broken.

> 'What, is it not enough that your employers should have the very marrow of your bones, for a pittance just sufficient to keep life and soul together, but they must arrogantly assume a dominion over your minds and consciences. Consider the importance of the subject before you, and do not prostitute your votes to gratify those who can no more do without your labour (nor perhaps half so well) as you can without their pay. . . .'

At the nomination meeting in Winchester a clear majority was claimed on Jervoise's side, 'a subject of congratulation, not only among ourselves, but to every Englishman. It is a triumph of freedom and independence over Ministerial tyranny'. It was further claimed that Portsmouth had indeed played its part, "In vain did the Commissioner of Portsmouth Dockyard, armed 'with the insolence of office', command the attendance of every dependent upon Government". These were brave words, but if the poll figures are examined, the Whig triumph was not the work of the 'free' voters of Portsmouth. The total votes cast were – Jervoise Clarke Jervoise 2015, Sir Richard Worsley 1484. In Portsmouth Hundred (that is, the towns of Portsmouth and Portsea) the votes were Jervoise 180, Worsley 337. If this does not prove dependence, it strongly suggests it.

In the next contested election for the county, in 1790, when the Carters held complete control of the borough franchise, a similar situation is evident. The Whigs Jervoise Clarke Jervoise and Lord John Russell, younger brother of the Duke of Bedford, were opposed by Sir William Heathcote of Hursley and William Chute of the Vyne near Basingstoke. John Carter and his friends canvassed for Jervoise and Russell, but again the question was asked, 'will the vote of the Dockyard men remain free of control?' Shortly before the poll it was claimed on the Whig side that the fleet had been detained in Portsmouth solely to secure the votes of 'hireling' voters. The supporters of Jervoise and Russell, suspecting that they were outnumbered, issued a last despairing call. They asked 'whether the County of Hampshire is to be Independent and freely elect its members, or, by taking the Court Candidates imposed on them by a Scotch Purser,[1] shall be disgraced to the abject state of a Dock-yard borough?' Nevertheless Heathcote (2013) and Chute (1805) were elected and Jervoise (1232) and Russell (1290) defeated. Proportionately the Tory votes were little more than three to two. Yet in Portsmouth Heathcote (481) and Chute (464) had almost three times the votes of Jervoise (160) and Russell (149). The Carter group might and did control the Corporation and thus control the election of the two members for Portsmouth, but the Admiralty rather than they controlled the Portsmouth votes in the county constituency.

One factor which had been evident in the Corporation struggle was commented on in 1790 in the county election. Sir John Carter chaired a meeting of Hampshire dissenters at Southampton in the early stages of the campaign, where it was resolved to request of candidates that if elected they should support measures for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Later, in Portsmouth itself, where dissent had a stronger hold, the question of the loyalty of dissenters was raised: 'The election dispute for this county has taken a curious and rather whimsical turn. The agents on both sides, having exhausted all their Billingsgate learning, have taken up the matter on a religious point of view. Pamphlet on pamphlet, for and against the Test and Corporation Act, daily make their appearance: and a clergyman of

[1] George Rose, one of Pitt's campaign managers.

Gosport, who had papered every wall in these towns with personal abuse, is now, in the shilling and sixpenny publications, attempting to prove that the National Assembly of France and all the Dissenters of every denomination in Great Britain are arrogant Republicans, at equal enmity with monarchy and hierarchy.'

The outbreak of war with Revolutionary France in March 1793 produced a temporary reaction in favour of Toryism and established institutions. Until then some measure of reform could be, and was, publicly argued by aristocrats, middle class and artisans. But increasingly during the subsequent years moderates moved to the right and public expression of demand for change was increasingly difficult, if not forbidden. In May 1792 the royal proclamation against seditious writings was issued – 'Whereas divers wicked and seditious writings have been printed, published, and industriously dispersed. . .'. Within a month or so Portsmouth, like other corporate bodies, had thought fit to vote an address to the Crown expressing its support. In November the first of the associations 'for preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers' was formed in London, and in December Portsmouth, like most towns, and even smaller communities such as Titchfield and Havant, followed suit. It may or may not be significant that the language used by Portsmouth Corporation was a little more restrained than that of some neighbouring places. Whereas at Gosport they spoke of 'our present glorious constitution' and of the 'nefarious endeavours of wicked, designing and ungrateful men', at Portsmouth a cooler outlook was expressed; 'The government of this country by kings, lords and commons, has by experience been happily proved to be the safeguard of our liberties'. In the dockyard also, twenty-one signatories, one from each craft in the yard, promised their best efforts in work and their support of the constitution against all its internal or foreign enemies.

The reactionary swing, however, was never a complete one. In May it was announced locally that among the first hundred signatures supporting the Friends of the People Society (an aristocratic association of advanced Whigs or liberals) were those of Lord John Russell (who fairly soon resigned) and the Hon. Thomas Erskine, the barrister M.P. for Portsmouth. That autumn also, the *Hampshire Chronicle* carried a series of articles on the corrupt representation of the people of Hampshire. 'Boroughs', it was said, 'are the excrescences upon the constitution'. The same paper again at the end of 1794 carried detailed articles on the famous trials for treason of the radicals Thomas Hardy, Thelwall, Horne Tooke and others. They were acquitted, and much of the credit for their acquittal went to Erskine with Gibbs, the other defence counsel, 'whose glorious struggle on this occasion will make them for ever dear to mankind . . .'. This was no doubt good reading for radicals but made little difference to any existing institutions. The 1796 general election went by with almost no contest in Hampshire, although Whig discontent showed itself in April of the following year at a county meeting said to be more numerous than ever remembered. A petition was carried praying for the dismissal of Pitt's ministry and for the making of a 'safe and advantageous peace' with France. Two matters, moreover, were a little outside the ordinary: the requisition to the Sheriff, asking that a meeting be held, had required him to call together at Winchester the gentry, clergy, freeholders (this much was common form) *and* inhabitants. The Sheriff, claiming that he could find no precedent for calling in the third estate, had failed to invite the inhabitants at large, and was criticised by Lord John Russell and others for his refusal. Secondly, although the demands of the meeting were moderate the reformers were accused in the *Salisbury Journal* of trying 'to seduce the honest Yeomanry of the County into the same practices as have almost drowned France in Blood'.

Underneath the remnants of Whig opposition lay a deeper, outright radical artisan movement, connected with the dockyard[1] and linked to the London Corresponding Society. No estimate of the strength of this movement can be made until further research is done; it is possible that a single newspaper reference in July 1796 has relevance here. 'Sundry symptoms of democracy have lately made their appearance in this place. A few nights ago caps of liberty, with the words 'Vive la Republique' were fixed on the Royal Arms (at the residences of) Mr. Buckland, druggist to the Duke of Clarence, Mr. Whitewood, and Mr. Bevar, distributor of stamps; and Mr. Fox's famous speech to the electors of Westminster, the last day but one of the poll, has been printed and stuck up through the streets of Portsmouth and Portsea by one party, and eagerly torn down by the other. This disorder is epidemical, and is spreading in an alarming manner.'

To ascertain how strong such a movement was, and the extent to which it survived into the years after Waterloo, is an urgently necessary piece of research.

---

[1] See Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans Culottes* (London, 1968).

III THE ECONOMIC RIGHTS OF MAN

It would be foolish to seek some rigid schematic or ideological pattern joining together the naval and military violence, the political struggles, and the economic strife in Portsmouth during these thirty years. By seeking a pattern one is liable to invent one. There are however some points of similarity. The naval violence moved from endemic friction to a more general outbreak: the political struggle passed from bourgeois liberal issues to more radical – if dimly heard – claims as to the rights of man. The problems of working men were at first disputes about traditional wage structures and conditions but at the end of the century they were nearer to a struggle about the economic rights of man.

The great size and rapid growth of the dockyard was, like the concomitant growth of Portsea town, frequently remarked. To quote again the Guide of 1775, a sense of incredible size, of extraordinary growth was conveyed: 'The Dockyard resembles a town in the number of its dwelling houses, offices, storehouses, lofts and other edifices erected for the various purposes of the yard. It contains amazing quantities of everything necessary for the royal navy. There are never less than 2,000 men employed in it, and in times of war upwards of 2,500. . .'.[1] During the next twenty-five years new docks, new workshops and new stores were built and the number of men employed reached more than 4,000.

The dockyard was a major industrial unit that included a variety of occupations, labelled, classified, and rooted in traditional patterns of industrial organisation. It was controlled, along with the yards at Sheerness, Chatham and Plymouth, by the Admiralty in London working through the Commissioner of the Dockyard. In the navy estimates for 1784,[2] an impression of this highly complex 'factory' is given.

	Daily Pay	*Nos. borne on Strength*
Shipwrights	2s. 1d.	767
,, (cabin keepers)	2s. 6d.	10
,, (quarter boys)	8d.	13
Blockmakers	2s. 1d.	4
Caulkers	2s. 1d.	103
Pitch Heaters	1s. 3d.	2
Oakum Boys	6d.	35
Smiths	1s. 8d.	76
,, (on anchors)	2s. 0d.	—
Joiners	2s. 0d.	69
House Carpenters	1s. 10d.	88
Wheelwrights	1s. 10d.	2
Plumbers	2s. 6d.	3
Bricklayers	1s. 8d.	17
,, (labourers)	1s. 1d.	18
Sailmakers	1s. 10d.	52
Riggers	1s. 6d.	140
,, (labourers)	1s. 1d.	110
Scavelmen	1s. 6d.	80
Labourers	1s. 1d.	300
,, (at Storehouse)	1s. 6d.	29
Locksmiths	2s. 6d.	1
and	2s. 0d.	1
Braziers	2s. 6d.	1
Founders	2s. 8d.	1
Sawyers—top men	1s. 8d.	134
,, —pit men	1s. 4d.	
,, —hand	3s. per 1000 ft	
Copper plate lacquerers	2s. 6d.	1
Masons	2s. 6d.	7
Warders	2s. 0d.	8
Workmen in the Rope-yard		
Spinners	1s. 8d.	117
Hatchellers	1s. 5d.	29
Winders	1s. 4d.	23

The dockyard was in fact a craftsman-dominated unit: more than half the employees were craftsmen, with the shipwrights at 2s. 1d. per day recognised as the standard – nearly double that of the labourers at 1s. 1d., the latter being approximately the same as that of the Hampshire agricultural labourer at this time. It was a rate of pay that had not changed since early in the century.[3] Above the general run of craftsmen were the handful of labour aristocrats – Master Mastmaker, Master Boatbuilder, Master Joiner, Master Sailmaker, etc., at wages some 50% higher. The basic working day, general in most occupations at this time, was from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. with $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours for dinner; in winter these times were necessarily shorter. Three single 'tides' of $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours each constituted a day's overtime. In peacetime short time was general – at one point in the 1780's men were working for a day and a 'tide', rather than a full week.

In June 1775, as a result of the outbreak of the American war, a major dispute broke out. The Admiralty were concerned to achieve maximum production in the dockyard as quickly as possible. They did what the majority of economic efficiency experts were suggesting – in agriculture as well as industry – they introduced a piecework system which the shipwrights resented. 'The dock-men here are greatly dissatisfied, on being compelled to do task-work; above 330 of them have struck off, and absolute-

---

[1] *Guide to Portsmouth* (Portsmouth, 1775).
[2] *Martin Papers. Add. MSS.* 41363, British Museum.
[3] Labour Relations in the Royal Naval Dockyards in 1739. B. Mc. L. Ranfft, *Mariners' Mirror*, Nov. 1961.

ly refuse to proceed further unless redressed.' A week later it seemed that a compromise had been reached; 'The shipwrights are gone to their work again upon their equal footing of two shillings and one penny per day, except fourteen [presumably of their leaders] who were lately discharged. Twenty-two are still under suspension'. A few days later the men came out again; they demanded an increase of 5d. per day, no task-work, and the reinstatement of their dismissed mates. This time they decided to state their case to the public in a handbill which the *Hampshire Chronicle* re-printed:

> 'To the Gentlemen, Tradesmen and Inhabitants of Gosport, Portsmouth and Portsmouth Common.
> By order from the Hon. the Commissioner and principal Officers of his Majesty's Navy, directing the Shipwrights of his Majesty's Yard to perform a mode of work called task, and conscious to themselves on the fullest conviction, it must occasion progressive suicide on our bodies, the destruction of our families, and inhabitants in general: another order already enforced at Plymouth whereby any persons from sickness, or being wounded, should be obliged to continue one month at home, be discharged: these, with a daily increase of grievances, have reunited the Yards to apply for redress, but have received no satisfactory answer. We have therefore agreed not to enter the Yard till redressed. And it is humbly hoped the worthy inhabitants will assist us in supporting us and families till relief is obtained, when it is hoped that we shall be enabled to make our most grateful acknowledgements to each Benefactor with a return agreeable to his subscription.'

The tone of the protest, as well as the objectives, remind one of the Spithead mutineers twenty years later.

Those who had originally struck on the piecework issue were joined by nearly a hundred day-rate men, who were themselves promptly dismissed. The ship-wrights – again one is reminded of Spithead – attempted to petition the Crown direct, sending Richard Soaper and William Fanley to join with men from Chatham, Plymouth and Woolwich, stating that their claims to the Board of Admiralty being unheard they were 'under the necessity of quitting for ever his Majesty's yards, unless redressed in their grievances'. The Navy's reply was to dismiss all the men and to start recruiting others. Advertisements were placed in the *Hampshire Chronicle* and elsewhere, for, 'able Shipwrights, who do not exceed 35 years of Age, and produce their indentures', Such men would be taken on at Portsmouth, Chatham, Plymouth and Woolwich, and would be allowed travelling money and conveyance of tools. At the end of July the shipwrights still held out: it was said that, 'They meet every day in a field near this town, where they transact all their business'. Early in August it was reported that the Admiralty had brought new men down from Deptford and gradually the strike collapsed. It was then at first stated that 'about 300 Shipwrights of those who worked Task are returned to the dockyard and are entered as fresh men, and are to work day-work as formerly, but we are told that those who worked day-work, and absented themselves with the task-men have also applied to be re-entered, and have been refused'. However it appears that the Navy, with the needs of the war pressing, could not afford to maintain this position and in mid-September, 'all the shipwrights who worked day-work and had absented themselves with the task-men, excepting for a few who are objected to on account of the late proceedings' were said to be re-entered. At the cost of losing some of their leaders the men had succeeded in delaying the piece-work scheme, which was not fully enforced until 1788, that is, in a period when peace made protest more difficult.[1]

In a lesser way the struggle between old customs and the newer 'efficiency' caused conflict in 1790. In March of that year 30 men were said to have been dismissed from the yard for stealing lead. The newspaper commented that if the government would give the men another 5d. per day, 'and not suffer them to carry a single article out of the yard', the country would be some thousands of pounds better off. It was a grumbling issue related to the ancient shipwrights' right to their 'chips' – that is, the right to take home spare off-cuts of woods, a right customarily accepted and claimed by the shipwrights as part of their necessary real wage, but condemned by those who wished to see a straight cash nexus replace the earlier money and perquisites system.

In the last years of the century it is evident – it was evident at the time – that there were new problems. The problem of poverty itself and the possible solutions or ameliorations could not be avoided. In Portsmouth, rapid growth could not all be absorbed by entry into the semi-aristocracy of skilled crafts. Great numbers of labourers were being employed in the dockyard and in ancillary developments; not all the seamen discharged from their ships made their way back home, wherever home might be: they stayed on, in fact, in Portsmouth, while at the same time the drift of people in from the countryside had already begun. Nationally, high taxation, a run of bad harvests, and a changing technology were creating acute problems.[2]

---

[1] Ranfft *op. cit.*
[2] See E. P. Thompson *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963).

In 1795, the year of the Berkshire magistrates' decision to make an allowance in aid of wages for labourers with above three children, the Hampshire magistrates, having conducted their own enquiry into 'the State of the Poor', made similar but more tentative suggestions. That September the Assize of Bread was set in the hope of holding down the price of the basic food of all labourers, urban and rural alike. In Portsmouth however the 'mob', or people, had not waited for the magistrates. As early as April, 'several bodies of 4 or 500 persons assembled at different parts of the town of Portsea, and put the inhabitants generally into the greatest fear and apprehension. All the houses and shops were immediately shut, but those on which the mob were intent, viz., the butchers and bakers, were either opened by their entreaty, or broke open by them, when the meat of all descriptions was demanded at 4d. per pound, and bread at 6d. per quarter. Those that complied with the demand were paid with exactness at the above price; but those who refused had their shops gutted, without receiving any more money than the mob chose to leave. The soldiers in the garrison, having in the morning demanded and obtained beef and mutton at 4d. per pound, could not be sent to quell a mob who only evinced a similar resolution. No other violence took place and we are happy in saying that no personal injury happened to anyone'. This essentially moderate comment of the newspaper suggested that the demands being made were not unreasonable, and that the method of protest, while not to be lauded, should perhaps be condoned. Or was it that *some* tumult in Portsmouth was assumed; that, like the press-gang, it was one of the facts of life?

A year later, after a temporary fall in the price of bread, prices again rose: 'a very large mob assembled in St. George's Square, Portsea, mostly consisting of persons belonging to the Dockyard and Victualling Office. About a thousand of them came very quietly into Portsmouth to state their grievance to Sir John Carter, one of the magistrates'. Carter said he would do what he could and the crowd promised to disperse: however they did not all do so, and on their way back to Portsea destroyed the houses of several bakers. The following night further demonstrations took place; three of the leaders were arrested and put in the lock-up, which the crowd broke open and demolished. Troops were then called out and arrests made before the crowd could be dispersed.

Food shortages and high prices produced other reactions than riots. There was the usual crop of recipes for the poor, whereby for half the price an equal amount of goodness could be obtained. For instance, it was said that the addition of bran water to plain bread-flour and water would give a bulk one and one-third times the usual. There were also charitable relief schemes, as in June 1796 when, it was said, 'the inhabitants of this town of Portsea have subscribed nearly £2,000 in order to establish a fishery for supplying themselves and the neighbouring towns with fish at a moderate price'.[1] In some respects the function of charity was itself seen to be changing. In the 1770's and 1780's charitable relief to the poor was, or was conceived to be, necessary for any unforeseen circumstance – it was a particular response to a particular need. Now, however, as a local newspaper said at the beginning of 1800, 'Soup establishments are becoming general throughout this kingdom'.

A few days after the fish supply scheme was put forward, another and more ambitious scheme was suggested. A company of corn merchants should be formed to raise £200 in £5 shares; a granary should be built, possibly above the town lock-up, and then by using bulk-purchase corn could be resold in small quantities at 3d. per bushel below the market price. The whole body of some forty subscribers was suggested as a committee of management from whom an executive committee might be chosen.

A far more significant attempt to solve the problem of food prices had however already been begun. This was referred to by the newspaper a fortnight later. 'A very laudable undertaking has taken place in the Dockyard, which if generally followed, will effectually destroy monopoly as far as the millers and bakers are concerned. More than £800 was said to have been already raised for the purpose of erecting a corn windmill and bread ovens. The foundation stone has been laid by William Garrett, Esq., the Mayor, Sir John Carter and other gentlemen'. Details of this very early co-operative society[2] still exist – the 'Articles of a Society, established by the Name and Stile of the United Society'.[3] It was printed by S. Mills at Portsmouth and gives details of an agreement made on 10 May, 1796 by 'dockyard people' to buy bread, erect a mill and bakehouse, 'for the cheaper supplying with bread and flour (and such other Necessaries of Life as They or the Majority shall think fit)'. The original articles of May 1796 were revised in 1802, the date of

---

[1] A full account of this fishery can be found in the Portsmouth City Record Office (CC 7/56).

[2] G. D. H. Cole in his *A Century of Co-operation* (1944) noted something similar at Chatham in the late eighteenth century.

[3] The document is in the possession of Portsmouth Public Library.

the document above quoted. The society maintained its existence throughout and beyond the war years.

A strict egalitarianism is noticeable in the framing of this agreement. There was a large committee of 29, large because it separately represented the different crafts in the dockyard. Thus there were:

2 Quartermen Shipwrights	7 Shipwrights
2 Caulkers	2 Smiths
2 Joiners	2 House carpenters
1 Bricklayer	2 Sailmakers
2 Sawyers	2 Ropemakers
2 Scavelmen	3 Labourers

It will be noted that the numerical preponderance of shipwrights was given due weight, but that the non-craftsmen, the labourers, were also represented. Again there were three treasurers, Walter Robinson, David Miall and Thomas Fabian serving at one time, and elections to the committee were to take place every six months, half retiring at a time. The fear of corruption that made radicals demand annual Parliaments is surely at work here. Further, in order to oversee the committee there was to be a body of trustees, not more than 19 in number, not less than 7. To prevent the advantages of the co-operative method being seized on by wealthier members, no person was allowed more than one share in the Society. By the time these rules were printed in 1802, 880 members were listed. Bread and/or flour was to be delivered to members' houses, baker and customer having duplicate tickets as to the amount required.

The dockyard workers' enterprise was praised; it was a form of self-help that made no demands on the rest of society. Other less acceptable ideas were present in these last few years of the eighteenth century. Towards the end of May 1797 the following brief report appeared in the *Hampshire Chronicle:* 'a curious mutiny broke out a few days since on a tailor's shop board in Oyster Street. The journeymen, 14 in number, chose two Delegates, seized on the shears, goose and sleeveboard. But on Mr. Laing, the proprietor, being informed that the mutineers had got possession of the arms, he instantly complied with their demands, an increase of wages: and subordination was happily restored without bloodshed'. The date gives the context of this episode; the mutiny at Spithead had only just ended. Whether the comment was largely facetious or was ironically reporting a serious occurrence I do not know.

In August 1800 the Mayor and magistrates announced that for the following quarter the Assize of Bread would not be set, that is, no official attempt would be made to control food prices. Almost immediately prices did in fact go up and there were further protests. On two successive evenings meetings were held, the second of which ended in seven people being arrested. A handbill, distributed by members of the dockyard, stated that they, 'the mechanics and workmen', would

> buy no butter at more than 9d. per pound;
> buy no cream at more than the proportional price;
> buy no milk at more than 2d. per quart;
> buy no potatoes at more than 6d. per gallon.

An accompanying statement declared, first, that the men were not attempting to state what prices *should* be, but merely claiming that prices were too high; since there was no scarcity of potatoes, why should the cost have risen to 9d. and 10d. per gallon? Secondly, a specifically moderate statement was made: 'Property is sacred. We abhor and detest all proceedings which disturb the public peace, and, if required, we will assist in preserving it, . . .' Thirdly, the public was requested to give general support: 'To say that all of us are deprived of those things would be false; from our Wages some of us can procure them; but those with large Families, as well as Workmen out of the Dockyard cannot procure a Sufficiency of the Necessaries of Life'. Although this was referred to as 'The Rising of the People' the newspaper merely argued in mercantilist terms the need to 'prevent Forestallers, Regrators and Monopolists, from continuing their nefarious practices'. If the dockyard craftsmen were speaking of non-violence and were prepared to help maintain the peace, there were others at least willing to threaten, though the penalties for incitement were heavy. A reward of £50 was offered by the Mayor of Portsmouth for information that would lead to the arrest of the originators of the following verse:

> 'Repent before too late, the time is drawing nigh,
> There's no repentance in Eternity:
> Yet we are friends to all Humanity.
> You grind us so our children can't get Bread,
> Consider this before you lose your Head.
> You have heard of Buonaparte and his Fame,
> Cause not the like in England to reign.
> The Halter's made
> The Time is near at hand
> That you must make
> Your exit from this land.
>
> Old England'

A similar attitude was again expressed shortly afterwards: 'On Thursday morning three Ropes were hung as Halters at the Lion-Gate, Portsea, and the following inflammatory paper posted underneath

'A Caution
To the Farmers, Millers and Bakers.
Here three you see,
Each of you take your choice.
The greatest Rogue,
May have the greatest hoist.'

At Gosport special constables and Volunteers were called out to prevent a meeting which it was feared might lead to a riot. In spite of this, while a magistrate, Mr. Curry, 'was thus engaged in the public service, some villain hung to the rapper of his door a written paper containing the most treasonable expressions against our Sovereign, and threatening destruction to Mr. Curry's person and property'.

Some fall in prices in November 1800 brought a measure of relief, although a note in December suggested that even this relief was partial: 'We are sorry to observe that Milk is advanced to Fourpence a Quart, and another inconvenience attends the increase, viz., water being a principal ingredient of the above article, the different vendors of it at Portsea have modestly doubled the price of each bucket'.

Neither 1799 nor 1800 mark either an end or a beginning to anything other than a period of time which we call a century. None of the problems discussed here was resolved: it can be argued they have not been completely resolved yet. The most that can be said is that the need for change had been demonstrated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS and thanks are due to Mr. A. Corney of the Southsea Castle Museum for his valuable help with the illustrations; to Mr. Michael Willis-Fear the Portsmouth City Archivist for permission to quote from documents dealing with the Spithead Mutiny; and to Mrs. D. Lovelock for kindly typing the manuscript against time and other pressures.

CITY OF PORTSMOUTH PUBLICATIONS

The Portsmouth Papers—Titles available

1. *Portchester* by Professor Barry Cuncliffe, 1967 (Illus.) 50p. *Reprinted* 1970.
2. *History of the Police of Portsmouth* by James Cramer, 1967 (Illus.) 50p.
3. *'Palmerston's Folly': The Portsdown and Spithead Forts* by Professor A. Temple Patterson, 1968 (Illus.) 50p. *Reprinted* 1970, 1974, and 1980.
4. *The Organs and Organists of the Cathedral Church of St. Thomas of Canterbury at Portsmouth* by Philip Barrett, 1968 (Illus.) *Revised* 1975 50p.
5. *The Naval Mutiny at Spithead 1797* by Professor A. Temple Patterson, 1968 (Illus.) 50p. *Reprinted* 1978.
6. *Portsmouth Railways* by Edwin Course, BSC (ECON), PHD AMINSTT, 1969 (Illus.) 50p. *Reprinted* 1972.
7. *The Siege of Portsmouth in the Civil War* by John Webb, MA, FRHISTS, 1969 (Illus.) 50p. *Revised* 1977.
8. *Portsea Island Churches* by Rodney Hubbuck, 1969 (Illus.) *Revised* 1976 50p.
9. *Portsmouth during the Great French Wars 1770–1800* by Alastair Geddes, 1970 (Illus.) 50p *Reprinted* 1980.
10. *Portsmouth – A French Gibraltar?* by Professor A. Temple Patterson, 1970 (Illus.) 50p.
11. *Portsmouth and the Fall of the Puritan Republic* by Dr. D. Dymond, CBE, 1971 (Illus.) 50p. *Revised* 1979.
12. *Portsmouth's Water Supply 1800–1860* by Mary Hallett, BSC (ECON), MPHIL, 1971 (Illus.) 50p.
13. *A History of Portsmouth Theatres* by H. Sargeant, FLA, 1971 (Illus.) 50p. *Revised* 1979.
14. *Portsmouth Nineteenth-Century Literary Figures* by Professor A. Temple Patterson, 1972 (Illus.) 50p.
15. *Portsmouth – As others have seen it* (*Part I 1540–1790*) by Margaret J. Hoad, MA, 1972 (Illus.) 50p.
16. *The Growth of Southsea as a Naval Satellite and Victorian Resort* by R. C. Riley, BSC (ECON), PHD, 1972 (Illus.) 50p.
17. *Captain John Mason and the Duke of Buckingham* by Dr. D. Dymond, CBE, 1972 (Illus.) 50p.
18. *Methodism in Portsmouth 1750–1932* by W. Donald Cooper, BA, 1973 (Illus.) 50p.
19. *Portsmouth and the Crimean War* by Margaret J. Hoad, MA and Professor A. Temple Patterson, 1973 (Illus.) 50p.
20. *Portsmouth – As others have seen it* (*Part II 1790–1900*) by Margaret J. Hoad, MA, 1973 (Illus.) 50p.
21. *The condition of the children of the poor in mid-Victorian Portsmouth* by Mrs. Jean Stanford and Professor A. Temple Patterson, 1974 (Illus.) 50p.
22. *Smugglers and Revenue Officers in the Portsmouth area in the Eighteenth Century* by Edward Carson, MA, FIL, 1974 (Illus.) 50p.
23. *Borough Government in Portsmouth, 1835–1974* by Sarah E. Peacock, BA, 1975 (Illus.) 50p.
24. *Portsmouth's Political Patterns 1885–1945* by G. J. Ashworth, BA, MPHIL, PHD, 1976 (Illus.) 50p.
25. *The Industries of Portsmouth in the Nineteenth Century* by R. C. Riley, BSC (ECON), PHD, 1976 (Illus.) 50p.
26. *An early Victorian Street – The High Street Old Portsmouth*, by John Webb, MA, FRHISTS, 1977 (Illus.) 50p.
27. *The Windows of Portsmouth Cathedral* by E. K. Barnard, 1977 (Illus.) 50p.
28. *Ritual Conflict at Farlington and Wymering* by Nigel Yates, MA, FRHISTS, 1978 (Illus.) 50p.
29. *The Common Lands of Portsea Island* by John Chapman, MA, PHD, 1979 (Illus.) 50p.
30. *The Western Defences of Portsmouth Harbour 1400–1800* by G. H. Williams, CBE, MA, 1979 (Illus.) £1.80.
31. *Early Man in Portsmouth and South-East Hampshire* by David J. Rudkin, BA, AMA, 1980 (Illus.) 50p.
32. *The Houses and Inhabitants of Thomas Ellis Owen's Southsea* by R. C. Riley, BSC, (Econ), PHD, 1980 (Illus.) 50p.

Portsmouth Record Series

Borough Sessions Papers 1653–1688 by Arthur J. Willis and Margaret J. Hoad, MA, 1971 (Illus.) £9.00.

Portsmouth and Sheet Turnpike Commissioners' Minute Book 1711–1754 edited by W. Albert and P. D. A. Harvey, 1974 (Illus.) £9.00.

Book of Original Entries 1731–1751 edited by N. W. Surry and J. H. Thomas, 1976 (Illus.) £12.00.

Maps of Portsmouth before 1801 compiled by D. Hodson, 1978 (Illus.) £12.00.

Other publications available

Fortifications in Old Portsmouth by A. Corney, 1965 (Illus.) 20p.

Southsea Castle by A. Corney, 1967 (Illus.) 10p.

The Civic Plate and Insignia of the City of Portsmouth (reprinted from the Connoisseur) by Sir C. Oman, 1965, 15p.

Guide to Historic Portsmouth (in colour) 15p.

Records of the City of Portsmouth 1835–1935 (Bound and Illus.) in three volumes, each £7.50. *1936–55* (Bound and Illus.) in two volumes, each £2.50.

Buildings of Portsmouth and its Environs by D. Lloyd, 1974 (Bound and well illustrated) £9.00.

Copies of these publications are obtainable from the City Secretary and Solicitor, Civic Offices, Guildhall Square, Portsmouth PO1 2AL and the Central Library and Museums.